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SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION TO VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT

This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team message.

¶1. (U) Vice President Cheney's March 17-18 visit to Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region dominated local news broadcasts and has received universally positive editorial commentary in Kurdish papers in addition to factual reporting. Local press underscored the "historic nature" of the visit as the Vice President is the highest ranking USG official to visit the region. Several papers reported that the Vice President sought the support of Kurdish leadership for national reconciliation and for specific legislation, including the hydrocarbons law. Local press also highlighted the Vice President's comments about the Kurdish parties' positive role in national politics and his invitation to Regional President Barzani to visit Washington.

¶2. (U) A commentary in KDP organ, "Khabat," stressed the warmth of the relationship and drew attention to the presence of the Vice President's wife, Lynne Cheney, in the delegation was taken as a sign of that personal warmth. Local papers also remarked on the rare presence of the KRG Prime Minister's wife, Nabila Barzani, at official functions.

¶3. (U) An editorial in the PUK organ, "Kurdistane Nwe," attributed the visit to soaring oil prices and noted the significance of the timing so soon after President Talabani's visit to Turkey. The fact that Cheney mentioned the "US-Kurdistan Region alliance" and "mentioned the role of the Kurds in Baghdad and the significant role of the Kurdish leadership in liberating Iraq" was "an important message that Washington wanted to convey to the relevant parties."

¶4. (U) An opinion piece in the PUK affiliated "Chawder" newspaper stated that the Vice Presidential visit to the region refutes the view that the U.S. is supporting other segments of Iraqi society at the expense of the Kurds, and that Kurdish support for U.S. priorities can cement a long-term relationship.

¶5. (U) Independent "Hawlati" suggested that Cheney reminded Kurdish leadership of the "special friendship" that dates back to 1991 when the Northern No-Fly Zone protected the autonomy of the Kurdistan Region and that the Kurds should repay the favor by supporting the Hydrocarbons Law which is "like a life preserver to save an America drowning in oil price increases." "Hawlati" goes on to suggest that Barzani will in turn demand support for implementation of Article 140 and security guarantees against foreign (Turkish and Iranian) attacks.

CROCKER